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New York

President:	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi	(Spain)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Martins
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. McCully
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Barro
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and give him the floor.

The Secretary-General: Today, I report to the Security Council for the last time on the situation in the Middle East. It saddens me that my last such briefing brings no sense of optimism for the future.

Some may ask why, given all the crises in the region, I have chosen to address the Council on the question of Palestine. To them, I say that while the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not the cause of the wars in the Middle East, its resolution can create momentum for peace throughout the region. In 1947, on the basis of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), the world recognized the two-State solution and called for the emergence of independent Arab and Jewish States. On 14 May 1948, the State of Israel was born. Almost seven decades later, the world still awaits the birth of the Palestinian State.

As the Security Council has made clear, Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have been under military occupation since 1967. These lands comprise the future Palestinian State, ultimately to be agreed by the parties through direct negotiations. History has shown that peace and security can be built only on the basis of respect and mutual acceptance. The right of the Jewish people to have a State does not negate the right of the Palestinian people to statehood.

Yet Palestinian frustration and grievances are growing under the weight of nearly half a century of humiliating occupation. Ten years ago, the majority of both peoples believed in the two-State solution; today, that majority is unravelling. Leaders on both sides increasingly speak to their ever more radicalized constituencies, rather than to each other. The expanding Israeli settlement enterprise and an ever-more entrenched status quo is preventing Palestinian development and locking in Gaza. Some Israeli politicians increasingly call for the so-called full annexation of the West Bank. Gaza and the West Bank remain politically divided, and Palestinian factions fail to make the compromises necessary for national unity. Israelis feel that there is no end in sight to terrorism, as incitement and calls for Israel's obliteration continue unchallenged by Palestinian leaders.

The framework for peace remains unchanged — the establishment of two States, on the basis of the principle of land for peace and a just and comprehensive regional peace consistent with relevant Security Council resolutions, as well as with existing agreements signed between the parties. As I took office 10 years ago, the Middle East was still recovering from the years of the second Palestinian uprising and the war between Israel and Hizbullah in 2006. The reaffirmation by the League of Arab States of the Arab Peace Initiative and the convening of the Annapolis conference in 2007 brought some hope.

Despite early optimism, attempts to reach a final resolution failed to make headway and were upended with the eruption of conflict in Gaza in December 2008. Further attempts at peace in 2010 and 2013 were equally eclipsed by renewed hostilities. The summer of 2014 saw the most devastating conflict in Gaza to date. During the height of the fighting, I traveled to the region and met with regional and international partners, as well as with the leadership in Israel and Palestine, to push for a ceasefire. An agreement, sadly, came too slowly for those who paid a heavy price during those 50 days of horror. I said then and I continue to insist that without addressing the deeper causes of this conflict, such cycles of escalation will persist.

Yet another troubling measure of the current state of play is that, during my tenure, the Security Council has adopted only two resolutions on the Middle East peace process, the most recent almost eight years ago.

We are fast approaching a precipice as a direct result of the actions of those seeking to destroy the prospects for peace. But there is a way out of this deadlock — by both sides implementing the recommendations in the recent report of the Middle East Quartet. That would demonstrate that Israelis and Palestinians are serious about building trust and laying the foundations for meaningful negotiations that would end the occupation based on the 1967 lines, establish a viable, independent Palestinian State, and resolve all final status issues.

But there are also major obstacles. As I have consistently stated, Israel's settlement activity beyond the 1967 line is in flagrant violation of international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Settlements eat away at the land meant for a future Palestinian State. Over the past decade, the number of Israelis living in settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has increased by some 30 per cent to about 600,000 people. A bill currently being debated in the Israeli legislature risks the regularization of more than 50 outposts and thousands of housing units built on private Palestinian land in the West Bank, which would be a clear violation of international law. If adopted, this legislation would for the first time apply Israeli law on the status of Palestinian land in the occupied West Bank. I strongly urge legislators to reconsider advancing the bill, which would have negative legal consequences for Israel and substantially diminish the chances for Arab-Israeli peace.

Bold steps by Israel to empower the Palestinian Authority, based on the transition envisioned in previous agreements, could bring benefits to the Palestinian people and increase Israeli security. Progress in this area, however, will be difficult unless the Palestinian authorities take brave and concrete steps to address incitement and violence. Acts and statements that glorify terror are unacceptable. I have repeatedly and strongly denounced incitement and all acts of terror. Stabbings, vehicle rammings and other attacks by Palestinians do nothing to advance their dream of statehood.

Israel must also understand that continued occupation and heavy-handed security responses — including the possible excessive use of force and the highly restrictive closure policy in Gaza — play into the hands of extremists. These actions risk undermining moderate voices, and further deepening the gulf between the two sides. I have also decried the practice of administrative detention and ill-treatment in detention by Israeli and Palestinian authorities alike. Similarly, executions of prisoners by Hamas in Gaza are absolutely unacceptable, and I continue to speak out against constraints on freedom of expression by Israeli and the Palestinian authorities, including against human rights defenders.

The absence of Palestinian unity throughout the occupied territory presents an obstacle to the two-State solution. The failure to organize Palestinian general elections has remained one of the clearest signs of this disunity and of the fragile Palestinian democratic process. The divisions between the West Bank and Gaza can be overcome only with the formation of a single, legitimate and inclusive Palestinian Government, on the basis of Palestine Liberation Organization principles. We must urge a renewal of the democratic legitimacy of Palestinian leadership and institutions and ensure that they represent all Palestinians. It is unacceptable that Hamas still boasts an anti-Semitic Charter that aspires to the obliteration of Israel. Hamas must once and for all renounce the use of violence and recognize the right of Israel to exist alongside a Palestinian State, in accordance with all relevant Security Council resolutions and previous agreements between the parties.

Over the past 10 years, the Palestinian Authority has made strides in building its institutions. In 2011, these achievements were recognized by the international community as being well positioned for establishment of a State. Palestine received non-member observer State status in 2012, and I witnessed, alongside President Abbas, the raising of the Palestinian flag for the first time at the United Nations just last year. Still, Palestine's State-building and democratic governance aspirations continue to be undermined by the occupation and the lack of Palestinian national unity.

The centrality of the challenges facing Gaza cannot be overstated. Indiscriminate rocket fire by Hamas towards Israel for a decade has convinced many Israelis that there is no hope for peace. After three brutal conflicts, Israel's crippling closures and a decade-long political divide have left 2 million Palestinians trapped in a humanitarian tragedy, without hope for a political horizon. I have witnessed this devastation on my four trips to Gaza. I must warn, as I have repeatedly stated, that Gaza is a tinder box. It is almost certain to explode unless movement and access restrictions are lifted and humanitarian needs are addressed; unless rocket attacks, tunnel construction and smuggling stop; and unless progress is made towards establishing a Palestinian State, with Gaza as an integral and peaceful part.

I also want to take this opportunity to commend the efforts of United Nations colleagues working with such diligence and dedication to promote peace and prevent yet more violence. Let me begin by honouring the 24 United Nations staff members based in the occupied Palestinian territory who have been killed in the line of duty during my tenure. Their sacrifices shall never be forgotten. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East provides a much-needed element of stability for 5.3 million Palestine

refugees across the region. It continues to face serious financial challenges. I urge Member States to honour their commitment and increase their contributions to the Agency.

The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process has been instrumental in bridging differences between all sides, facilitating negotiations and engaging with the region and international partners. The United Nations country team is working under difficult circumstances to provide relief to vulnerable Palestinians and to help build the institutions and policies of a future independent Palestinian State.

During the past 10 years, I have argued that we must never accept bias against Israel within United Nations bodies. Decades of political maneuverings have created a disproportionate volume of resolutions, reports and conferences criticizing Israel. In many cases, rather than helping the Palestinian cause, that reality has hampered the ability of the United Nations to fulfil its role effectively. At the same time, Israel must realize that the reality in which a democratic State governed by the rule of law keeps the Palestinian people under military occupation will continue to generate criticism and calls for accountability.

As we look to the future, I call on the Security Council to reaffirm without reservations that there is no alternative to the two-State solution. The status quo entrenches a one-State reality of perpetual occupation and conflict. We must not give up on the right of Palestine to exist, just as we must protect the right of Israel to exist in peace and security with its neighbours.

I urge the Council to explore the vast potential of incentives and begin immediately to develop, in consultation with the parties, an agreed framework for advancing a final resolution to the conflict on the basis of direct negotiations. The upcoming conference in France could be an opportunity to begin that discussion.

The Arab Peace Initiative presents a chance to develop a comprehensive settlement of the conflict. But there cannot be sustainable peace between Israelis and Arabs without progress towards Palestinian statehood.

Ten years ago, my predecessor, Kofi Annan, called for a revitalized Middle East Quartet, working closely with international and regional partners, to facilitate and sustain direct negotiations. I fully believe that architecture remains critical.

Since becoming Secretary-General, I have visited the region 11 times, including during periods of war. For 10 years, I pressed Israelis and Palestinians to start believing in a common future, bound by their undeniable historic, religious and national connections to the land. Those aspirations have not been fulfilled. I will continue to hope that the majority of Israelis and Palestinians are tired of the tug-of-war over historical narratives.

But hope alone will not end the occupation, or rid the Palestinian and Israeli peoples of their legitimate fears. There must be a major shift to courageous and concrete action by the parties that enables meaningful negotiations. The United Nations will continue to assist that process.

Ultimately, it is up to Israelis and Palestinians to make peace — we cannot do it for them. They must rebuild trust in each other as the only way to address the fears and suspicions that have led to the deep polarization we see today. At the same time, we all can — and must — contribute to building trust, so sorely needed in the Middle East and the world today. That work must begin now, before it is too late.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. McCully (New Zealand): The situation in Syria is bleak. Aleppo has fallen. The fate of tens of thousands of civilians is unclear. Despite the strong calls from members of the Security Council and others, civilians continue to suffer.

New Zealand has used strong words in this Chamber to describe the actions of Russia, and we stand by them. Indeed, Russia, Iran and the Syrian Government bear much of the responsibility to ensure the protection of civilians. They must allow the United Nations to do its job to get aid to those who need it and to ensure the safety of those who stay and those who wish to leave.

The Security Council will meet behind closed doors shortly to talk about how the United Nations might get more involved in eastern Aleppo. To date the Security Council has been unable to meet its responsibilities. Unless that is going to change, it is our view that an emergency special session of the General Assembly is an appropriate next step.

In thanking His Excellency the Secretary-General for his final briefing on the Middle East it is difficult not to be struck by the depressing familiarity of much of what he has imparted: a continuation of incitement and violence against ordinary Israelis and Palestinians and a continuation of the settlements programme, which undermines the prospect of a viable Palestine and challenges the credibility of any commitment to the two-State solution.

In listening to today's briefing and to recent briefings by the Secretary-General's Special Coordinator it is difficult to understand how the Council can be silent when the space for a two-State solution is being so clearly undermined. Since 1947, the Council and the international community have embraced the notion of two States living peacefully side by side as the only acceptable basis for resolution of this issue — as reinforced in Oslo and Madrid and in a number of Security Council resolutions. But we have been told in words of one syllable that developments taking place on the ground now threaten the viability of the two-State solution and that the people on the ground are losing hope in the two-State solution, with all of the consequences that follow.

Since the previous briefing to the Council (see S/PV.7820) we have seen the situation compounded by legislation before the Knesset that could lead to the legalization of settlements and outposts, including on privately owned Palestinian land. Since the last briefing we have seen opportunities missed to advance Palestinian reconciliation.

In the past we have participated in these debates and expressed frustration with the challenges and shortcomings from all sides, but also expressed optimism that we would somehow see parties find their way back to the negotiating table. That has been difficult, but we are now moving beyond difficult. We are now moving into a space in which the plain facts are telling us that the forces currently in play will irretrievably undermine the prospect of two States living peacefully side by side.

It is difficult to see the legislation now before by the Knesset as other than a direct challenge to the notion of a two-State solution and a direct challenge to the resolutions previously adopted by the Council.

Where does that leave the Council? It is eight years since the Council last adopted a resolution on this question. Over that time a good number of reasons have been advanced as to why further Council pronouncements might be counterproductive or premature. But when the Secretary-General and his representatives tell the Council that not only are people on the ground losing hope in the two-State solution but that the facts on the ground are being altered to render a two-State solution unviable, it seems to me that the Council must either reassert, on behalf of the international community, a firm commitment to the two-State solution or it should start to turn its attention to its responsibilities in the event there is one State not two. A one-State future clearly takes us into territory that no friend of Israel wishes to contemplate.

My country has been engaging with fellow Council members on the type of draft text that would reassert the two-State solution and call clearly for a halt to the violence and the settlements, which threaten to undermine this process. We very much welcome the advice that Arab colleagues are working on text for this purpose.

It is time for us, the collective membership of the Council, to stop being bystanders and act as the custodians of the two-State solution that we should be.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I want to begin by welcoming the Secretary-General's briefing, as this will probably be his last public meeting on the issue. I want to thank him for his unflinching activism on the Middle East peace process. It has been a difficult and, at most times, frustrating portfolio, but he has not wavered in his resolve to bring a conclusion to what is one of the longest-running issues on the Council's agenda. I agree with every word that he said in his briefing just now. But it is perhaps with his successor in mind that I want to talk today. He faces a challenge on which we, in the broadest possible sense, have failed for over 60 years.

So, what can we do, as members of the Security Council, to make sure that the ninth Secretary-General of the United Nations does not have to endure the frustrations of his predecessors? What can we do together to ensure that the people of Israel and Palestine enjoy decades of peace ahead rather than relapse into more decades of division and hatred? I want to focus on three issues where our activism is needed most: illegal settlements, Gaza, and incitement and violence.

The United Kingdom's position on settlements is clear. It is a position shared by all of us around the table, I think. The settlements are illegal under international law and take us further away from the two-State

solution that we all want to see. Despite the findings of the Middle East Quartet report this year, the situation has only gotten worse. As the Foreign Minister of New Zealand said, we are especially concerned by the land regulation bill in the Knesset, which would retroactively legalize settlement outposts in the West Bank. Should that proposal go ahead, it would be a serious blow to the prospects for a two-State solution. It would pave the way for an exponential rise in settlements deep in the West Bank and create more grievances, hopelessness and anger among Palestinians. The United Kingdom regularly raises the issue of settlements with Israel, at all levels. The Foreign Secretary raised it when he met Prime Minister Netanyahu on 30 September. But we should also use the voice of the Council to make that call, to urge Israel to cease its policy of settlement expansion so that that grave barrier to peace can be lifted.

Turning to Gaza, it is clear that there is a real risk of a return to conflict. As we saw in October, rocket attacks have continued, as have the Israeli responses. We should speak loudly and clearly in the Chamber. Terrorist groups in Gaza must permanently end rocket fire and other attacks against Israel. But the woes of Gaza go beyond the unacceptable acts of those groups. It is estimated that 90 per cent of Gaza's water is not fit even for agricultural use, and that Gaza continues to have the highest unemployment rates in the world. Some progress is being made — education and health facilities have now largely been rebuilt — but reconstruction is far from complete. Efforts need to focus on house rebuilding and reviving the economy, stimulating exports and creating jobs. So we encourage the Israeli authorities to improve Gazans' access to clean water and to improve the flow of the necessary construction materials into Gaza, such as concrete. In tandem with that, let us recognize that our support is needed too. Donors must honour their commitments made at the International Cairo Conference on Palestine for Gaza Reconstruction. Too many are still outstanding. The United Kingdom stands ready to play its part.

Turning to my third point, we are pleased to see that the levels of violence have dropped in recent months, but again there is much for both parties to do to de-escalate tensions and prevent incitement. We cannot underestimate just how corrosive racist, anti-Semitic and hateful language is in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. Together, we must deplore incitement on all sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including any comments that stir up hatred and prejudice. Sadly, such hatred is not limited to words alone. We are appalled by terrorist attacks against Israeli citizens. We are appalled at the violence committed by extremist settlers against Palestinians. We unequivocally condemn all such incidents.

Before I give up the floor, I recognize that it will take more than the Council's words to finally make progress. We also need to work with partners in the region and internationally to produce improvements on the ground and build trust between the parties, if we are to secure progress towards meaningful negotiations. With that in mind, it is incumbent upon the Council to take appropriate action in support of those efforts. We believe that there is clear merit in a Council resolution that commands the full support of the Chamber. We will judge any proposal that emerges on its merits and on whether it supports progress towards peace, but there is a great deal that we can all agree on, and I hope that we can make progress towards a lasting peace in the days and weeks ahead.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We note with regret that the situation in the Middle East and North Africa continues to be tense and explosive. Over the past few years the situation in the Israeli-Palestinian track has continually worsened. Negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians have been de facto frozen. After the completion in April 2014 — without any tangible results — of a nine-month round of Israeli-Palestinian contacts under the auspices of the United States, the situation in the Middle East process has become significantly worse, as evidenced by regular clashes in the West Bank, outbreaks of violence from which peaceful Palestinian and Israeli civilians suffer, and violations of the ceasefire in Gaza.

We strongly and unconditionally condemn any terrorist activities, which stoke an already tense atmosphere in the region. We must put an end to violence. We are very worried about unilateral actions by Israel creating irreversible facts on the ground. The Israeli Government, in spite of the unequivocal condemnation of the international community, continues to build settlements and expand them in the occupied territories, expropriating land in the West Bank and destroying Palestinian homes. All of those actions undermine the prospects for a two-State solution, to which there is no alternative, as recognized by participants to the conflict and the international community, as a whole.

Russia, as a member of the Middle East Quartet of international mediators, is trying to reanimate the negotiations and re-establish a political horizon in the peace process. We note the report of the Quartet, published on 1 July, on the status of the peace process, and see it as a consolidated form of a message from the international community. We are convinced that a good-faith implementation by the parties of the recommendations contained in that report would contribute to improving the situation and overcoming mutual distrust.

One of the main obstacles to resuming the peace process is the division within the Palestinian ranks. In the future, we intend to continue our efforts to reestablish Palestinian unity, based on the political platform of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We are particularly concerned about the situation in Gaza. The humanitarian situation there is very severe. That means that Palestinians living in Gaza cannot look forward to any sort of future, which contributes to their radicalization. It plays into the hands of the extremists. We share the views of the international community on the need to put an end to the embargo imposed on Gaza as soon as possible.

Next year will mark 50 years since the adoption of resolution 242 (1967), one of the foundational documents of the legal basis for the Middle East peace process. We note with regret that, half a century later, the root causes of that protracted and chronic conflict have not been dealt with and that prospects for a peace settlement are very dim. In the context of the conflicts all over the Middle East, the situation could lead to the worst possible consequences.

The continuous turmoil and upheaval that began six years ago, and was hastily and naïvely called the "Arab Spring", has created massive unresolved problems. Yemen and Libya, which were often touted as models of the democratization process, are still suffering from bloodshed and power struggles. There is a grave situation in Iraq, and the conflict in Syria has reached tragic proportions. The senseless and shortsighted actions of certain countries, characterized by interference in internal affairs and attempts to change rogue regimes in order to impose their recipes for democracy without taking into account the historic, cultural and religious specificities of Middle East States, as well as the direct involvement of those States, have led to the emergence of a large area of chaos and anarchy.

Of course, terrorists from Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Jabhat al-Nusrah, Al-Qaida and affiliated groups have taken advantage of that situation. Overall, in a whole range of countries in the region, State institutions have been destroyed and humanitarian socioeconomic problems have become severe, which has provoked an unprecedented wave of migration. From the very beginning of the Syrian crisis, Russia has consistently advocated its peaceful resolution, while respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. We are convinced that there is no alternative to a political solution, based on an inclusive inter-Syrian dialogue, while at the same time ensuring the cessation of hostilities, increasing humanitarian access and continuing the fight against terrorism.

It is precisely that complex position that is enshrined in the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex), in Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 2254 (2015), and in the corresponding decisions of the International Syria Support Group. Thanks to the actions of the Russian Air Force, we managed to prevent terrorists from seizing Damascus, undermine the military and economic potential of the terrorist groups, and liberate large swathes of territory. In addition, we are providing assistance in establishing dialogue between the Government of Syria and the representatives of the internal and external Syrian opposition with a view to finding a common Syrian consensus on a political and diplomatic settlement of the crisis.

The Russian Federation continues to make every effort to de-escalate tensions and resolve the most acute humanitarian problems in Syria, especially in Aleppo, where military activities are ending and the withdrawal of fighters and their families from the eastern part of the city is continuing. At the same time, large-scale humanitarian and medical assistance is being provided to the Syrian population affected by the conflict. Over the past few days, the main flow of Russian humanitarian aid has been directed to Aleppo. We believe that the most urgent task now is the comprehensive end of military activity and the resumption of inter-Syrian negotiations. Damascus has more than once confirmed its readiness to take part in such negotiations.

In Iraq, the violent confrontation and struggle against Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)

is continuing. After terrible losses and defeats, the Iraqi forces have managed to regain control over the strategically important cities of Ramadi and Fallujah. On 17 October, with the assistance of the so-called anti-ISIL coalition, the military operation to liberate the main stronghold of terrorism in the country, Mosul, began. As we understand, it is still premature to speak of significant victories. Meanwhile, during the two-month campaign, the humanitarian situation has seriously deteriorated; the number of internally displaced persons exceeds 90,000 and more than 700,000 are in need of urgent assistance.

The situation in Yemen and Libya is also very serious. According to international humanitarian organizations, 82 per cent of the 27 million population of Yemen require urgent humanitarian assistance, and according to the United Nations Children's Fund, every 10 minutes one Yemeni child dies from hunger.

As a result of the disintegration of Government structures and the de facto vacuum of power, Libya has become a transit point for migrants seeking to cross the sea into Europe and a breeding ground for terrorism, cross-border crime, arms smuggling and drug trafficking. Since the beginning of the year, more than 328,000 illegal immigrants have reached Europe by crossing the Mediterranean.

The situation in the Middle East and North Africa and the spread of terrorist activities beyond that region demonstrates, once again, that in today's world no single State is immune from the threat of terrorism, and no single State will be able to sit on the sidelines in an oasis of security. On that basis, we believe that the task of paramount importance is to join forces, based on the principle of the indivisibility of security, so as to combat terrorism and extremism and to form a truly universal anti-terrorist front.

Russia is not trying to reap geopolitical dividends from the geopolitical instability in the region, or to assert its influence by reformatting the Middle East region. We are in favour of decisive action to destroy ISIL and other terrorist groups, wherever they are, and we are for a speedy resolution to all crises through political and diplomatic means, in strict accordance with the principles of international law. We support concrete and effective measures for improving the humanitarian situation and the socioeconomic recovery and revival of the region. Those urgent tasks can only be tackled in the framework of active and effective international cooperation.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing. China applauds the Secretary-General's tireless efforts to advance the Middle East peace process.

The issue of Palestine lies at the heart and at the source of the larger Middle East question. Today, the situation in Palestine is dire. The peace talks between Palestine and Israel are mired in an entrenched deadlock, with violent clashes occurring continuously, together with serious humanitarian crises. In particular, Israel's continued construction of settlements has undermined the prospects of the two-State solution. The international community should feel a greater sense of urgency, take tangible actions and help bring about a comprehensive and just settlement of the Palestine issue without delay. The international community should stand behind Palestine's independent statehood and the peaceful coexistence of Palestine and Israel, which is the right way forward. Having a State of Palestine, based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital and enjoying full sovereignty, is an inalienable right of the Palestinian people.

The parties concerned should steadfastly advance the peace process on the basis of the principle of land for peace, the two-State solution, the Arab Peace Initiative and the applicable Security Council resolutions. The international community should encourage Palestine and Israel to hold fast to the correct course of peace talks. Both sides should exercise maximum restraint so as to avoid any further escalation of the tensions. Israel should be the first to show good will by halting the construction of settlements and the demolition of Palestinian homes, so as to create enabling conditions for the resumption of the peace talks. The parties concerned should show vision and foresight, proceed from the fundamental long-term interests of both peoples to make a political decision, and strive to resume fruitful talks as soon as possible.

The international community should maintain its effort to lend effective support to the Middle East peace process. China supports all peace efforts aimed at de-escalating tensions between Palestine and Israel and realizing the two-State solution. We support the establishment of more effective mechanisms to help bring peace to the Middle East. We also support the idea that the Council should honour its responsibilities

and take action without delay to address positively the legitimate concerns of Palestine and the Arab States. In that process, the parties concerned should strengthen coordination with Palestine and the Arab States so as to form a synergy.

China is a staunch supporter of the just cause of the Palestinian people and is an active mediator for Palestinian-Israeli peace. As a permanent member of the Council, China stands ready to work with the rest of the international community towards a just solution to the Palestine-Israel issue and towards peace and stability in the Middle East as soon as possible.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like to begin by thanking the Secretary-General for the particularly incisive stocktaking that he has just shared with us after 10 years of managing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also for his unremitting commitment to dealing with that critical issue.

Unfortunately, we cannot contest his assessment about the inexorable marginalization of the two-State solution, which is still the only one that responds to the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians and Israelis to live in peace. While the climate that has paralysed the peace process for the past two years is a shared responsibility, it is undeniable that the ongoing Israeli settlements are the main challenge to implementing a two-State solution. The settlement enterprise is the product of a deliberate policy, one that is more and more obvious, and that is carving up the territory of a future Palestinian State. We can see that in various ways: the de facto annexation of Zone C and of its natural resources, transfers of populations, the obstruction of the movement of populations, the demolition of homes and humanitarian infrastructure and a plan to legalize illegal outposts. It is our responsibility to firmly and collectively condemn that policy because we are convinced that it is leading to disaster, for not just the Palestinians, but also for Israel.

Secondly, the radicalization of people, acts of violence and terrorism and incitement to violence are also ongoing threats that can cause a rapid degeneration into an uncontrollable conflagration. We have seen that on too many occasions, with three wars Gaza in September and the violence that culminated between October in 2015 and April 2016. That violence severely undermines the prospect of two States, a Palestinian State and an Israeli State, living side by side in peace and security.

Finally, progress in the Palestinian reconciliation is also indispensable.

For several years now, the so-called status quo in the Middle East has really constituted a state of regression — daily regression for the people and for peace. With every day that passes, we see further threats to the two-State solution, and yet, more than ever, that should be our sole common compass. Given that assessment and will, France, under the leadership of the President of the Republic, Mr. François Hollande, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jean-Marc Ayrault, presented an imitative last spring aimed at finding a way out of the current impasse. Though the peace process was partially eclipsed by the serious crises elsewhere in the Middle East, our primary objective was and continues to be to place this conflict back at the heart of the political priorities of the international community.

Since the beginning and at every stage, our approach has been transparent vis-***à-vis*** the parties, inclusive and dovetailed with existing efforts, especially those of the Quartet and our Arab partners. The ministerial meeting that was held on 3 June in Paris marked the first essential phase of international mobilization to save and make the two-State solution concrete. Following that meeting, in-depth work began with all partners wishing to contribute to developing a comprehensive incentive package, one that shows that both parties can only benefit from peace, and that the current situation has a cost — a cost to Israeli and Palestinian economic development, a cost to building a viable Palestinian State and a cost to the stability and prosperity of the region as a whole. As a result of that work, which has been going on for about a year, France will organize an international conference in January, brining together all partner States that advocate for peace. Our goal is to present the contributions of the international community to relaunching the negotiating process and to concluding the implementation of a peace agreement.

First, in collectively reaffirming our support for a two-State solution in a context where the situation continues to deteriorate, we are determined to recall that it is the only possible solution to the conflict and to recreate a political climate that can actually reverse the negative spiral we are seeing on the ground and to recreate positive momentum. Secondly, our goal is achievable by promoting international engagement based on a coherent mechanism for concrete support and incentives towards relaunching dialogue between

the two parties. We all know that only the Israelis and Palestinians can achieve peace directly. However, we must also acknowledge that the conditions today are not conducive to resuming such negotiations.

Therefore, our initiative seeks to promote a convergence of efforts in the same direction with a view to recreating an enabling environment for dialogue and negotiations, showing the parties just how much they stand to gain by bringing about peace. If we do not take resolute action in that direction, the two-State solution will continue to erode and disappear, like a mirage in the desert. There is no other valid alternative that can actually meet the legitimate aspirations of both parties. We therefore must do everything within our power, while we still have time, to prevent such a drift. I will state once again that such a drift will never lead to a just, enduring solution to the conflict and will continue to threaten balance in the region.

That is the sense of efforts of France, along with all our partners, working towards a favourable momentum based on a two-State solution. We particularly call for the support of the members of the Security Council, to shoulder together the historic responsibility that is incumbent on us to achieve peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): My delegation is grateful to His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his presence and briefing today. We thank him for his frank assessment and strong message, and we appreciate his untiring efforts to facilitate peace in the Middle East, specifically on the Palestinian question. I also acknowledge the presence of His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of New Zealand, Mr. Murray McCully. Malaysia appreciates New Zealand's persistent commitment to pushing for Council actions to create the necessary conditions for peace in the region.

My delegation decided to take the floor today to echo the views expressed around the table for the need for the Council to take decisive and concrete action on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in line with the Council's responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations.

For far too long, the Council has been in a state of inertia when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which belies the worsening situation on the ground. Malaysia reiterates the need to create the necessary conditions for peace and to push the parties in the right direction in order to salvage the two-State solution. Clearly, doing nothing is not an option for the Security Council as an organ entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security. We must take urgent, effective actions to hault and reverse illegal settlement activities and end illegal occupations, which are fuelling radicalization in the region and beyond.

Over the years, we have heard repeated warnings from the Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator, Mr. Mladenov, about the expansion of settlement activities that threaten to bury the two-State solution. And yet, Israeli settlement activities have kept growing, despite their undeniably illegal nature under international law, the clear recommendations of the Quartet report and the widespread condemnation of the international community. Recent developments have led to a new sense of urgency, especially the unprecedented attempt by the Israeli parliament to pass a bill to legalize outposts, including on private Palestinian lands. Furthermore, just last week, Israeli authorities decided to proceed with a plan to build 770 housing units in the illegal Israeli settlement of Gilo, in East Jerusalem.

As we have heard from the speakers at the Arria Formula meeting on settlements last October, the impact of settlements on the Palestinians are far-reaching. Settlement expansion has led to an increase in settlers' violence, demolitions of Palestinian homes and structures, confiscations of Palestinian lands, discriminatory policies and denial of development infrastructure and natural resources. Palestinians are even prevented from burying their dead relatives in the Muslim cemetery adjacent to the Al-Aqsa Mosque because Israeli authorities have seized the cemetery land. Since the beginning of this year, Israel has demolished 866 Palestinian structures in Area C of the occupied West Bank, affecting over 5,000 Palestinians of whom over 1,200 have been rendered homeless, including 586 children. The widespread anger, frustration and despair inevitably fed into further radicalization of the oppressed population that has nothing more to lose.

Settlement activities constitute the single biggest threat to peace and the two-State solution. That threat has multiplied and become entrenched over the decades because of the Council's inaction. It is long overdue for the Council to assume its responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations to maintain international peace and security and strive to reverse the negative trends that are threatening peace and the two-State solution. The Council is responsible for

the current predicament in the occupied Palestinian territory, but we can also undo that damage if we stay true to the values and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and uphold international law and international human rights standards.

I reiterate that the Council has various tools at its disposal, which it has not shied away from using in various conflict areas in the world. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be no exception. We have seen how providing incentives, whether in the form of the comprehensive Arab Peace Initiative or the billions of dollars in military aid sent to safeguard its security, have done nothing to persuade Israel to move in the direction of peace or led it to grant any concessions to uphold the two-State solution. Instead, it has further emboldened Israel to intensify its settlement activities and entrench its repressive occupations.

We need to stop rewarding illegal behaviour that threatens peace and security in the region and beyond. We need to stop shielding those who have continually violated Council resolutions, international law and human rights standards. The Council has a moral, legal and political responsibility to end Israel's repressive occupation and sanction its settlement activities, apartheid policies and gross violations of human rights, as well as to ensure accountability and support the fundamental right to self-determination. The Council should not be left high and dry, waiting for another resolution.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing. Japan appreciates the dedication shown by the Secretary-General in promoting the Middle East peace process.

The briefing by the Secretary-General today was a sad reminder that we have been unable to deal with the persisting issues blocking peace and the two-State solution in the region for the past 10 years. Japan's position is that it will not recognize any unilateral change by either party that may prejudice the final resolution. In that regard, Japan reiterates that settlement activities are in violation of international law and urges Israel to completely freeze such activities. We are deeply concerned about the recent advancement of legislation that would allow for the retroactive legalization of illegal Israeli outposts located on private Palestinian land.

We firmly believe that the issues surrounding the peace process should, first and foremost, be resolved through direct negotiations. We are deeply disturbed by the continuing violence between the two sides. Although the degree of violence has been relatively low in the past few weeks, its root causes have not been addressed. The persisting acts of violence from both parties are fundamentally incompatible with a peaceful solution. It is important that leaders on both sides take steps to prevent violence and incitements to violence, and show credible commitment to the peace process.

There is broad agreement within the Council on the urgent need to save the prospects of a two-State solution. Japan supports initiatives that benefit the Middle East peace process. Japan appreciates the efforts made by the various parties and is ready to constructively engage in those initiatives. The Secretary-General noted that the Council has adopted only two resolutions concerning the Middle East peace process over the past 10 years. It is disappointing to be reminded that we are still addressing the same issues that those resolutions aimed to deal with. It is important for the Council to send a united message to the parties to reaffirm the commitment to peace. Japan believes that the message to be sent should be effective, unequivocal and meaningful, and contribute to promoting the peace process together with other initiatives. Japan stands ready to work with other Council members to that end.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): We appreciate the Secretary-General's active stand on the issue, and we share the understanding of many States represented in the Chamber that the status quo in the Middle East leads only to further instability and makes the prospects of a two-State solution increasingly remote. Therefore, only proactive diplomatic efforts, including on the part of the Council, combined with a common desire of both sides to the conflict, can lay the groundwork for restarting the political process and moving away from the ongoing deadlock in the Middle East peace process.

We cannot allow the hopes for peace on both sides to vanish completely. So many decades without real peace are inadmissible. Ukraine welcomes any international effort aimed at bringing a new dynamic to the Middle East settlement and seeking opportunities for the resumption of negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian sides. We therefore appreciate the ongoing efforts of France to unblock the Middle East peace process. We still hope that the Palestinian and Israeli authorities will respond positively to the invitation to hold an international conference in January next year in

Paris and will sit at the negotiating table in order to try to revive prospects for a peace settlement.

Yet again, we have to signal our strong concern over the continuous recurrence of violence in Gaza and the West Bank. The incident that occurred this week, on 14 December, left two Israeli police officers wounded and a young Palestinian man dead. The attack near the Austrian Hospice guest house in the Old City is yet another reminder to all of us of the urgent need for action.

We remain convinced that the establishment of a stable, peaceful and democratic Palestinian State is in Israel's long-term security interests. However, the ongoing process of settlement expansion and the legalization of outposts do not contribute to the already moribund peace process, and must be stopped. Settlement construction in the West Bank and the two-State solution are two paths going in opposite directions.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing today on a central issue in the Middle East that is ever present in our minds but ever absent from the Council, namely, the Palestinian question.

We had hoped that, to guide our future work, the Secretariat would issue a written report on what has been done over the past 10 years, or rather what has not been done, what has not been resolved, and what the international community, the Organization, and the Council in particular, have failed to achieve, namely, to put an end to the longest standing occupation in modern history.

Time and again, the international community has agreed on and expressed its consensus on the so-called two-State solution, comprised of an Israeli State and a Palestinian State within the borders of 4 June 1967. Palestine would be a valuable State with Jerusalem as its capital. However, it seems that such agreement and consensus are confined only to occasional words and statements in an attempt to save face by boasting about the assistance provided to the Palestinian people. It seems that it is the fate of those people to be eternally grateful and forever indebted to those who have sought to improve their lot in exchange for surrendering their fate and future to external Powers that take control of their land, demolish their homes, displace their population and besiege it behind walls.

The reshuffling of cards and the denial of truth have reached a new low. Some have rushed to condemn Israel's attempts to legalize new outposts in the occupied Palestinian territory, hoping that we will heap praise on them. Perhaps they hope that we will overlook the fact that all settlements in occupied Palestininan territory since 1967 are illegal according to all international instruments and conventions, including Council resolutions, which have apparently become ineffectual.

The Israeli settlement activities are not just an obstacle to peace and the two-State solution; they are at the heart of the crisis. The cause of Palestine, first and foremost, is the cause of a land occupied by force; the cause of a people who have been denied their right to live a life of dignity in their own homeland. In that regard, I would like to remind the Council of an internationally agreed principle that has been buried alive, namely, the principle of land for peace principle.

The different levels of humanitarian attention accorded to the Palestinian question must be examined in comparison with other issues in the Middle East: it is truly a source of surprise. The deafening voices lamenting the absence of conscience and humanity on certain issues suddenly fall silent when the issue at hand is the issue of a people whose generations — including women and the elderly — have only known injustice over the past decades.

I call on everyone here today to self-reflect and to be true to themselves. I call on the Council to pay serious attention to the most urgent challenge of our time, namely, the possible collapse of the two-State solution.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing. We also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his efforts, which we support.

The Secretary-General summarized the past decade for us, during which unfortunately little has improved in the Middle East. It is with sadness and pain that we received today's assessment of the situation, which hardly appears encouraging.The Middle East region is suffering from a number of civil wars and sectarian wars: together with the presence of various terrorist and extremist groups the area has been transformed into a permanent battlefield and is causing enormous suffering to the civilian population, particularly in Syria, Iraq and Yemen.

In the light of what we have heard, we cannot ignore the fact that some members of the Organization, including Security Council members, have had and continue to have significant shared responsibility in those conflicts. As for their place in history, only time will tell.

With regard to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian question, this is a topic that must continue to be high on the agendas of the Organization and the Security Council and we should not give up in spite of the current impasse. Ever since the partition of Palestine in 1948, Uruguay has been in favour of the creation of two States, one Jewish and one Arab. We have always followed the situation in the region very attentively and we are extremely concerned about the lack of progress between Palestine and Israel given the humanitarian, political and security consequences it holds for both countries, as well as the impact it has on the entire Middle East region.

Uruguay would once again like to reiterate its support for the right of both Israel and Palestine to live in peace within safe, secure and internationally recognized borders in a environment of renewed cooperation free of any threats or actions that could threaten peace. We once again endorse the two-State solution for two independent States and we are convinced that this is the only way that will make it possible to ensure the peaceful co-existence of Israel and Palestine. Today it is more essential than ever that the international community reinforce its efforts to support this process and encourage the parties to return to the negotiating table.

Uruguay is also worried about the expansion of settlements in occupied Palestinian territory and the West Bank. As we have mentioned, these settlements are illegal under international law and are in contravention of the recommendations of the Quartet. Uruguay reiterates its call to the parties to refrain from taking any unilateral actions could undermine dialogue and to abide fully by their obligations under international law. We urge Israel to halt its settlement practices.

Futhermore, Uruguay emphatically condemns terrorist acts and the glorification of violence occurring on Palestinian territory. It is therefore extremely important to give political signals to find a way out of the current vicious cycle of withdrawal and violent confrontation. It is important for the parties to refrain from taking unilateral measures that undermine dialogue and instead comply with all obligations under international law and Council resolutions in good faith.

We reiterate our willingness to continue working together in order to reactivate the peace process through all existing initiatives in order to overcome the current status quo, including some within the framework of the Council. None of these initiatives can or should replace the best way to achieve peace, that is, direct, bilateral negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians that will make it possible to find a satisfactory solution to this process.

In this Chamber in the past I quoted the American poet Bob Dylan, specifically the old song *The Times They Are A-Changin'*. I fear that, without decisive and concrete action by the Security Council, we will have to utter a different phrase as times will have indeed changed.

Mr. Barro (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): Let me begin by thanking Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for giving us his final briefing on various aspects involved in the Palestinian question. Like other speakers before me, I would like to pay tribute to him once again for his commitment to this issue.

The briefing we just heard is full of lessons, but we must also face the sad reality of the Palestinian people. Despite multiple initiatives, the future of the peace process continues to offer little hope: in fact, we might say that it has reached an impassse. Unfortunately, we see the two-State solution disappearing more rapidly each day — at a time when we are witnessing the continued acceleration of settlement activities, especially new units in Gilo, East Jerusalem, whereas in 2006 such demolitions of homes, premises and other buildings affected only 2,500 citizens.

At the last Arria Formula meeting on settlement activity, on 14 October, thanks to the initiative of five members of the Security Council, we heard statements made by experts, including Israeli citizens, that there is clear progress in populating occupied Palestinian territory based on the official policies of the Israeli Government. We therefore solemnly called for the Security Council at last to work towards ending the occupation and settlement activities, which, I remind the Council, affects both Palestinians and Israelis alike.

I would also like to highlight the ongoing impact of this conflict on children, mostly Palestinian;. But we must also not forget that Israeli children, too, are

suffering from this conflict. As far as these children are concerned, they have known only war and occupation. However, along with Israelis and Palestinians alike, we share the same aspirations for peace and stability. The Council must act to restart negotiations leading to a solution to those disputes.

In accordance with resolution 1860 (2009), we reiterate our call to lift the blockade on Gaza, which has had devastating humanitarian and socioeconomic consequences, affecting around 2 million people, half of whom are children. We recall the urgent need to rebuild Gaza, in particular through the pledges that were made at the international donors conference held in Cairo in 2014.

Without progress in the peace process, there will be no end to the violence that affects both Palestinians and Israelis. We reiterate our disapproval and condemnation of violence and terrorism, as well as incitement to hatred, regardless of the perpetrators or the motivation. We moreover reaffirm our position in favour of holding a follow-up conference to the conference held in Paris in June in order to give every chance of success to the French initiative, for which our delegation renews its support. We also support diplomatic efforts undertaken by Egypt and the Russian Federation, which, in our view, require further coordination.

It is the responsibility of the international community, of the Security Council first, as the guarantor of international peace and security, to work for the two-State solution — one Palestinian and the other Israeli, living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized, secure borders. That is the intention of all the relevant United Nations resolutions and what is recommended in the Quartet's report of 1 July. According to the report, the time has come for this body, whose members agree on the obstacles that stand in the way of a lasting solution to the dispute, to take up this critical issue as soon as possible and reaffirm the centrality of the two-State solution.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Out the outset, I thank His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing, reporting the lack of progress and the contradictions of the Organization with regard to the Palestinian question. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the dedication of the Secretary-General to peace in the Middle East and his firm commitment to the women, men and children who have suffered because of the conflicts affecting the region.

In the context of the various complex and tragic events now taking place in the Middle East, which continue to be a source of deep concern for the international community, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela will focus its statement today — which will probably be the last in the Security Council — on the Palestinian question, one of the most unjust and tragic situations that even the United Nations has not been able to resolve. It is one of the deepest and most influential with regard to the other problems and tensions affecting that afflicted region. Moreover, it is a long-standing issue that we have not be able to resolve. So far it has been a massive failure of the Security Council, above all of the permanent members, who through their veto or their silence have encouraged Israeli violence against the Palestinian people.

During our term as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, we have witnessed with frustration the disregard of continual appeals by Venezuela and other Council members, as well as numerous Member States and the international community in general, for the Security Council to take decisive action and adopt a unified position promoting peace, the end of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, the lifting of the blockade on the Gaza Strip and the settlement of the conflict through the two-State solution.

We believe that the Organization's ethical commitment to the Palestinians and the responsibility of the Security Council in maintaining peace and security compel us to insist more forcefully, in this body, that it take steps to move the peace process forward, ensure that the Council continues to be actively and constructively involved in the process to achieve a just and lasting solution to the conflict and restore hope to those who are suffering from the brutal occupation that United Nations will honour its moral debt towards the Palestinian people. Otherwise, this meeting will be nothing other than an exercise in diplomatic rhetoric.

We believe the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at a total impasse. The occupying Power, Israel, remains intransigent and not only continues its pernicious and unjust occupation of Palestine, but also the expansion of its territory through the expropriation of land legitimately held by Palestinians and the building of settlements. The aggression of the Israeli

Government against the Palestinian people through the expropriation of land, the forced displacement and expulsion of Palestinians, the demolition of Palestinian infrastructure and homes and attempts to retroactively legalize Israeli settlements in the West Bank is a clear demonstration of an extremist and aggressive policy launched by the Israeli Government and supported by the colonist sectors of public opinion in Israel that see the annexation of Palestinian territory as a fact on the ground, thereby undermining of the two-State solution and the viability of a Palestinian State. Approximately 700 Palestinian homes have been destroyed this year by the occupying Power, while plans to expand settlements and construction have not ceased. It is up to the Council to take urgent action to condemn illegal settlements and demand and require that Israel end this illegal expansionist policy.

Furthermore, the Israeli authorities have insisted on their intent to crush the will of the Palestinians by ongoing violations of their most fundamental basic rights in the occupied territories and in the Gaza Strip, which has been under siege and blockaded by Israel. Israel has made disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force through its military and security forces, with lethal consequences, including more than 220 Palestinian fatalities since October 2015 and more than 7,000 Palestinians wounded by real ammunition and rubber bullets fired by the Israeli forces. That violence has not subsided.

One must also take into account the more than 7,000 Palestinians who are being held in Israeli jails, including more than 500 children, for whose release we continue to call. We wonder how the permanent members of the Council can remain silent on that situation, especially those who provide Israel with political and military support while in other situations they deliver emotional statements on the subject of human rights. How is it possible to sustain such a double moral standard?

Moreover, the situation of the more than 700 individuals who are suffering unjust administrative detention is of grave concern. They include the recent cases of Anas Shadid and Ahmad Abu Fara, victims of administrative detention who have been on a hunger strike for more than 50 days to protest the deplorable conditions of detention in Israeli jails. Their health has been seriously harmed by the authorities' indifference and refusal to release them. Israel does not care about the fate of the Palestinian people. Its responsibility as an occupying Power is totally ignored. We therefore once again request the Council to consider the possibility of seeking concrete and expeditious measures for the effective protection of the Palestinian people from the abuses by Israel in the occupied territories, in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention, on the protection of Civilians.

There must also be an end to impunity, which shelters those responsible for attacks, acts of aggresion, killings and violations of the human rights of Palestinians. Accountability for such reprehensible behaviour should a part of the demands to which the Israeli authorities must answer. In addition to the aggresion provoked by institutional authorities, Palestinians are currently suffering from the violence from more than 600,000 Israeli settlers — with the direct and implicit support of the Israeli authorities to carry out their acts of extreme violence — who are continuing to uproot Palestinians from their own ancestral land in order to blot out the notion and the very possibility of a Palestinian State.

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, which has been blockaded and besieged by Israel, as well as in the other occupied territories, reveals a deteriorating situation characterized by continuous violence and ongoing pressure exerted by Israel, in violation of fundamental norms of international law, including international humanitarian law, so as to limit or deny access to health care, education, housing, jobs and basic services — such as water and electricity — and the freedom of Palestinians in the West Bank to undertake religious and cultural activities. Furthermore, the blockade in Gaza has prevented the Palestinians from even beginning to rebuild the territory after the criminal Israel aggression of 2014. The blockade has cut all links with the West Bank.

The people of Gaza are encountering similar difficulties to those in other occupied territories regarding access to basic services and fundamental rights. All of this is due to the actions of the occupying Power. The blockade of Gaza serves to further radicalize the Palestinian population in order to maintain the division between Gaza from the West Bank.

In that sombre context for Palestinians, the possibility of negotations that might lead to a peaceful, sustainable and fair two-State solution is more urgent than ever. The role of the Security Council is fundamental in moving towards the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We must therefore abandon inaction and commit ourselves to seeking effective

options to achieve peace. In that regard, there is a need for a Security Council resolution demanding an immediate cessation of the illegal Israeli settlements, in order to send an initial message of the unity of the Council, and thereby on an issue on which there is a broad convergence of views with respect to settlements being illegal, constituting an obstacle to peace and a factor that negatively affects the possibility of a two-State solution. We all agree that the end of the settlement policy would be an important step towards direct negotiations.

We would like to say that we think it inappropriate and unjust to speak in this Chamber about disproportionate resolutions against Israel. It is unacceptable when the responsibility of the United Nations is to support the weakest party to a conflict, who is often the victim — in this case, that party is the Palestinian people. The Palestinian people have been savagely assaulted and violently punished by the occupying Power, which violates international law with impunity thanks to its military superiority and the political support it has in the Security Council. We think that the Council ought to assume its responsibility, which is common but differentiated in this case, because a large part of the Palestinian tragedy is the responsibility of the Council due to its inaction and its veto of peace.

In the waning days of our country's status as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, we would like to reiterate the position that we expressed on the very first day of our term on the Council, namely, that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land must end — for we all know that it is the root cause of the conflict — and that we must support the work of the Middle East Quartet and all other efforts by the international community, including initiatives by various members of the Council, such as Egypt, France and Russia, which we commend.

We also welcome the holding of an international conference in January. We should do everything possible to promote the political process and negotiations between Israel and Palestine with a view to establishing a peaceful two-State solution, taking into account the Arab Peace Initiative and acknowledging the right of the Palestinian people to live in their own State — a full-fledged State Member of the Organization that cosexists peacefully alongside Israel, in line with the internationally recognized pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. All of this is in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. These are inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. My country, which has always supported the just Palestinian cause, will continue to advocate in this forum and others for urgent action to end the conflict at hand and put an end to the shameful and criminal occupation by Israel of Palestinian territory.

As we have said on numerous occasions, and as has been repeated numerous times here in the Council, the status quo is unsustainable. We cannot continue offering excuses and preconditions on events that are the consequence of the occupation, including the desperate acts of violence, which we also condemn; or for the lack of unity among Palestinians. The Security Council must act decisively to effect change in this situation that demands and obliges both sides to come back to negotiations. It must express support for the Middle East Quartet in order to show support for the efforts of other Member States in the Council to bring the parties together. Venezuela is ready to work on a draft resolution with Member States, such as New Zealand, to provide impetus to work urgently on this and constructively contribute to a document that reflects the consensus that exists among the members of the Council regarding the necessary condemnation of illegal Israeli settlements and the need for progress on the Palestinian question.

As this is our last statement as a non-permament member of the Security Council on the Palestinian question, we call on the conscience of all those present, particularly the permanent members, so that we can hear the clamor of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights to their own State and to peaceful coexistence. We must take concrete steps forward on the difficult path towards a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and for his efforts throughout his tenure to secure peace and protect civilians in the Middle East and throughout the world.

With regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the trends are indeed discouraging, which is why it is so critical that we all work to keep the possibility of peace open. There really is no alternative. The United States remains committed to achieving a lasting resolution of the conflict and we will continue to work to advance the interest that we all share — bringing about a

lasting peace between Israel and Palestine. We remain in close consultations with the parties to the conflict and key stakeholders to try to move things in a more positive direction. We continue to call upon all sides to demonstrate with actions and policies a genuine commitment to the two-State solution, which will enable a resumption of meaningful negotiations in the future.

The current United States Administration has consistently opposed every effort to delegitimize Israel or undermine its security, including at the United Nations. We will continue to oppose any draft resolutions that would seek to do so.

As the Council knows, we are very concerned about the situation on the ground and believe that current trends are moving in the wrong direction. That includes our serious concerns about continued settlement activities. Make no mistake: the United States views settlements as illegitimate and counterproductive to the cause of peace. In his recent remarks at the Saban Forum, Secretary Kerry made clear that Israel now faces a choice between continued settlement activity and a two-State solution in the future. As he said, while we do not believe that settlements are the root cause of the conflict, they clearly represent a barrier to achieving a two-State solution. The number of settlers in the West Bank has increased from 110,000 at the time of the Oslo Accords, in 1993, to nearly 400,000 today.

We are deeply disturbed by Israel's moving forward on the unprecedented legalization under Israeli law of outposts deep in the West Bank. We believe the potential legalization of thousands of settlement housing units that are currently illegal under Israeli law would profoundly damage prospects for a two-State solution. We are further troubled when Ministers in the Israeli Government say publicly that there will be no Palestinian State.

Terrorism, incitement to violence, glorification of terrorists and other violent acts also profoundly threaten efforts to advance peace. We continue to stress to the Palestinian leadership the importance of strongly opposing violence in all forms. We continue to make clear that the terrorism and incitement to violence must end. Such acts run contrary to efforts to preserve prospects for peace.

We strongly condemn terrorist acts and other violence against Israelis and Palestinians. There is absolutely no justification for such acts. We are also deeply concerned about reports of excessive use of force by Israeli security forces against Palestinian civilians. Authorities should conduct timely and transparent investigations into these incidents and ensure that appropriate measures, including prosecution when warranted, are taken to follow through on the findings.

There are some positive examples of coordination between Israelis and Palestinians that should be encouraged. For example, coordination between Israeli and Palestinian security forces has played a key role in preventing a greater deterioration in the security situation, and that coordination should continue. We have also seen coordination among civil-society actors work to the benefit of both sides. Facing some of the worst fires in recent memory, Palestinian civil-defence teams funded by the United States Government again came to the aid of their Israeli counterparts, battling fires in Haifa and in Beit Meir and Nataf, near Jerusalem. This is the type of cooperation that can benefit all.

Economic development is also necessary, and the private sector can play a vital role. For example, the first Coca Cola factory opened in the Gaza at the end of November. The plant will create 300 direct jobs and 3,000 indirect jobs in the Gaza supply chain. The licensed manufacturer of Coca Cola in the West Bank and Gaza also committed an initial $1.3 million to a corporate social-responsibility fund to create additional jobs for Gaza youth and improve access to clean drinking water in a Gaza refugee camp. On 1 December, donors pledged at least $175 million in grants and $270 million in soft loans for the trilateral Jordanian-Israeli-Palestinian Red Sea-Dead Sea water project. Cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority is vital to addressing the region's water scarcity and ensuring the survival of the Dead Sea.

Still, additional steps are urgently needed to stabilize the economic situation, especially in Gaza, and to reverse current trends. We continue to stress the importance of both sides demonstrating through policies and actions a genuine commitment to a two-State solution in order to reduce tensions, rebuild trust, avoid a cycle of escalation and restore hope.

Mr. Martins (Angola): This is the last opportunity for us to speak in this Chamber on the question of Palestine and the Middle East peace process. As a non-permanent member of the Security Council, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General and commend him for his consistent engagement with the

peace process, and in particular for his work in favour of the two-State solution. I would also like to express appreciation the positive engagement of New Zealand, and especially the presence in the Council this morning of Foreign Minister Murray McCulley.

Over the past two years, a great amount of information was provided from United Nations sources, humanitarian agencies, civil society and warnings made by the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy with regard to the unsustainable status quo on the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the mounting threats to the two-State solution. However, despite the overwhelming evidence, the Council has been unable to effectively address the situation.

The matter of the fact is that Israel, with its relatively great military power, has pursued the colonization of territories against the will of their populations for almost half a century. Palestinians living under harsh occupation and brutal blockade face systematic discrimination and violations of their basic human rights. We in the Security Council cannot continue defending equal treatment of both sides and shared responsibility for the lack of progress in the two-State solution. We wonder how it is possible to apply the same level of legal, political and moral obligations and responsibilities to the Palestinians, who are dispossessed of their homelands, deprived of natural resources and economic development and restricted in their movement. Such treatment is one of the main root causes that creates, fuels and breeds anger, frustration and despair, giving rise to acts of violence and extremism.

In that context, we commend the drive in recent months by the international community to mobilize in order to salvage the process and prospects for the two-State solution. Israeli policies of continued settlement expansion is a real threat to the two-State solution. All members of the Council reiterated that point this morning. The Government's latest move to adopt a legalization bill aimed at sanctioning the illegal settlements and outposts built on private Palestinian property in the West Bank is a step further towards annexation and a demonstration of our collective failure to bring about dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. The Council is called upon to act decisively and in unity if we are to defuse another explosive ingredient in an already volatile region.

Angola therefore welcomes initiatives by a number of Council members to unblock the situation, especially the French conference that is due to take place, seeking to restart negotiations, since it is our collective responsibility to act, and urges the Council to uphold its responsibilities in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. We furthermore welcome efforts by the League of Arab States and look forward to the outcome of the ministerial meeting, which we hope will provide a workable road map on the way forward. As important as it is to get the parties back to the negotiating table, however, we must insist that the Israeli Government halt and reverse the illegal settlement activity and put an end to the blockade of Gaza, which has been the cause of a dire humanitarian situation so far and for too long.

During the past two years, we have tried to actively participate in all initiatives to revive the Middle East peace process. In Security Council debates, in private consultations, in several Arria Formula meetings, we have tried to contribute to finding a solution for this long-standing conflict. The international community and the United Nations membership agree that the Council has enough tools at its disposal to address the issue of the settlements, since they are illegal under international law and constitute the most concrete threat to the two-State solution.

As we come to the end of our two-year participation as a non-permanent member, let me reiterate the hope that the Council will look at the two-State solution not as a mere slogan, but as a workable, effective road map towards peace in this very volatile region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a brief statement in my national capacity.

I should like to ask Mr. Mladenov to convey to the Secretary-General, who had to leave the Chamber because of other commitments, that he could not have done more in 10 years. He has tried everything. He maintained innumerable contacts with the parties and we share his assessment.

Spain too will be leaving the Security Council in two weeks. I will therefore provide a brief summary of our position and what we are currently concerned about.

We are concerned that the Knesset is considering a draft law to legalize outposts in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. We are concerned about the expansion of

settlements and the demolition of Palestinian structures. We are also concerned about the terrorist violence and incitement to the use of force. Lastly, our understanding is that reconciliation at the intra-Palestinian level is essential if we are to reactivate the peace process.

Our commitment — Spain's commitment — to peace in Palestine has no expiration date. It began with the Madrid Conference in 1991, and we have continued to work since then. The most recent example of this was the summit of religious leaders of the Middle East, which was held in Alicante on 15 and 16 November. I am pleased to say that this was a success and that a press release was adopted that represented an important step forward for tolerance and mutual respect. When we leave the Security Council, we will continue to take initiatives of this kind.

Over the past two years, at no time have we lost hope that the peace process could be unblocked, nor did we resign ourselves to seeing the Security Council fail to play a role in this process. Peace, as many have said, can be the only outcome of direct bilateral negotiations and the support of the international community can be a key factor. For that reason, we support the various initiatives currently under way, in particular the French initiative and the work of the Quartet. We also reiterate the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative. Any action in the Security Council must take this context into account.

Like other representatives, we note that behind all the Security Council's initiatives there is a will to preserve the two States and that there is a clear feeling that the settlements are among the main threats. I shall therefore conclude by saying that I trust that the Security Council can give effect to concrete action before Spain leaves the Council.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.